



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

20

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To: Robert W. Healy
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From: Susan Schlesinger 
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RE: Holmes Trust Project in Central Square

Date: February 19, 1997

The process related to the Holmes Trust proposal began formally with an application to the Central Square Advisory Committee, which took place in early July. The Central Square Overlay District creates the Advisory Committee, which is composed of nine members representing business people, residents of the adjacent neighborhoods, and design professionals. The Committee held six meetings to review the project, on July 23, July 30, August 6, August 20, November 12, and December 2, 1997. More than ten hours of public comment was taken at those meetings. In response to the Advisory Committee's initial report the proponent redesigned the building in an attempt to deal with the concerns that were voiced during the Committee's review process.

After the completion of the initial Committee review, the Holmes Trust submitted a Special Permit application to the Planning Board. The process for considering such an application, outlined by state statute, involves a public hearing with a 90 day period of deliberation after the public hearing. In this case the Planning Board held a public hearing on November 18, 1997 and continued that hearing to January 13, 1998. Approximately five hours of public testimony was taken at those two sessions of the public hearing. At the conclusion of the hearing in January the Board requested that the proponent voluntarily extend the period within which the Board could review and discuss the project's merits. This request was agreed to by the Holmes Trust and an extension of time was granted until March 20, 1998.

The first time, and only time, the Planning Board has had an opportunity to discuss the proposal, and the testimony received at the public hearing, was for a portion of the Board's regular meeting of February 3, 1998.

The Planning Board generally reacted favorably to the mix of uses proposed, including retail stores on the ground floor, a small office component and a large element of housing consisting of approximately 72 units, fifteen percent of which would be affordable. However, members of the Board did express concerns related to the design of the building. Those concerns included issues related to the raised courtyard, the height of the building elements, particularly those adjacent to Carl Baron Plaza, the traffic study methodology, and the character and diversity of the retailers who would occupy the building upon completion. The Board, as it often does during a special permit process, requested the Community Development Department staff to work with the project proponent to modify the building design to reflect its concerns. Since the February 3 Planning Board meeting, Community Development Department staff has also met with concerned residents about a range of concerns.

The Board will next consider the project, as it has been revised after the February 3 discussion, on March 3, 1998. At that meeting the Board will review the changes made and make a preliminary determination as to whether the requested special permits should be granted. Public comment will be taken at the end of the meeting related to the physical changes that have been made to the proposal by the proponents and other aspects of the project.

In advance of that March 3 meeting, revised plans will be forwarded to the Advisory Committee as soon as they are received by the Community Development Department. The Committee will be encouraged to make additional comments to the Planning Board at the March 3 meeting.

Consent Agenda #20

S-99

Relative to Awaiting Report Item
Number Twenty-two, regarding a communication
from James Williamson concerning
the Holmes proposal.

In City Council February 23, 1998

PLACED ON FILE